

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
Carol C. Lam***

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For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - June 7, 2005

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced today the unsealing of three related Indictments and three Complaints charging thirty-three defendants, many of whom are members of a street gang in North San Diego County, with drug-trafficking and money-laundering offenses.

According to the charging documents, in April 2003, the North County Regional Gang Task Force (the NCRGTF) and United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began an investigation of the poly-drug distribution activities of the Rodriguez Drug-Trafficking Organization ("Rodriguez DTO"), led by Juan Rodriguez. Rodriguez first came to the attention of law enforcement agents because of his membership in the Encinitas Home Boys Street Gang and his drug-trafficking activities in the local area.

As detailed in court papers unsealed today, the United States alleges that, over the last three to four years, Rodriguez has operated a drug-trafficking organization that distributes large quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana throughout the nation, with distribution points in Florida, Hawaii, Nevada, Illinois, Wisconsin, Alabama, and Oklahoma. The United States further alleges that Rodriguez

obtained the controlled substances from various sources of supply, both domestic and Mexican.

In a pre-dawn operation on June 6, 2005, twenty-eight members or associates of the Rodriguez DTO were arrested in a nationwide effort. Several of those arrested are alleged to have been sources of supply for the Rodriguez DTO, including Jose Concepcion Meza, a resident of Perris, California, Martin Becerra-Amezquita of El Cajon, California, and Samuel Meraz-Valenzuela of Escondido, California. The United States additionally alleged in court papers that the Rodriguez DTO supplied large quantities of drugs to distribution cells headed by Francisco Balderas, Jr. and Juan Ochoa, both of whom have ties to street gangs in the North San Diego County area. Also arrested on charges of conspiracy to import and distribute controlled substances and of laundering of drug proceeds were Norvell Martens, Don King, Gwyneth Powell, Terry Vilsack, Enrique Camacho, Erika Salazar, Monica Ochoa, Belem Rodriguez, Maria Luisa Rocha, Jesus Rodriguez, Efren Balderas, Jose Lara, Scott Rutherford, and German Lopez. At the time of Monday's operation, six of those indicted were already in custody on related charges.

The Rodriguez DTO allegedly utilized stash houses in North San Diego County to store drugs after they were imported into the United States from Mexico. The drugs were then shipped throughout the nation via commercial parcel services and U.S. mail, or were transported across the country in vehicles equipped with secret compartments.

According to Assistant U. S. Attorneys Alana M. Wong and Michelle P. Jennings, who are prosecuting the case, NCRGTF and ICE agents served 21 related search warrants on Monday. As a result of those search warrants, agents reportedly seized approximately 164 pounds of marijuana, 1 pound of cocaine, 44 grams of methamphetamine, 22 firearms and assorted ammunition, and \$45,500.00 in cash. In connection with the operation, agents also seized two homes, two vehicles, and a Winnebago. Prior to June 6, 2005, ICE agents reported that, in connection with numerous Rodriguez DTO seizures over the past year and a half, agents had seized a total of approximately 5 ½ pounds of methamphetamine, 1,239 pounds of marijuana, 23 kilograms of cocaine, and \$125,000.00.

United States Attorney Lam said, "Street gangs are pushing drugs, and now we are pushing back. Gangs that profit from narcotics trafficking are a double blight on our neighborhoods, and we are determined to eradicate it."

"Not only are these individuals members of a well-entrenched local street gang, they also posed an additional threat to many communities through their longtime international drug trafficking network that extended into multiple states," said Michael Unzueta, ICE Acting Special Agent in Charge for Investigations in San Diego.

The defendants appeared before the Honorable Louisa S. Porter, United States Magistrate Judge at the United States Courthouse in San Diego this morning. The defendants are scheduled to appear next in court on June 9, 2005 at 3:00 p.m. before Judge Porter for a detention hearing, and before the Honorable John A. Houston, United States District Court Judge, on July 8, 2005 at 10:30 a.m. for motion setting.

DEFENDANTS

Juan Rodriguez
Jesus Rodriguez
Jose Concepcion Meza
Juan Ramon Ochoa
Francisco Balderas, Jr.
Robert Aloysius Maher
Ruben Moreno
Enrique Camacho
Oscar Damian Arias
Timothy Eliot Vilsack
German Lopez
Matthew Ryan Wilson
Erika Lizeth Salazar
Julio Ponce Calderon
Scott Lindsey Rutherford
Martin Becerra Amezcuita
Jose Espinoza
Javier Torres Rocha
Efren Balderas
Paul Patrick Gillespie
Norvell Henry Martens
Terry Vilsack
Brian Todd Chase

Gwyneth Christine Powell
Donald Lawrence King
Samuel Meraz-Valenzuela
Jose Lara
Gregory Williams
Monica Ochoa
Belem Rodriguez
Maria Luisa Rocha

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Importation of Controlled Substances and Conspiracy to do the same, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Sections 952, 960, and 963

Maximum Penalty: life in prison, ten-year minimum mandatory sentence, 5 years of supervised release, and \$4,000,000 fine

Distribution of Controlled Substances and Conspiracy to do the same, Possession With Intent to Distribute Controlled Substances and Conspiracy to do the same, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Sections 841(a)(1) and 846

Maximum Penalty: life in prison, ten-year minimum mandatory sentence, 5 years of supervised release, and a \$4,000,000 fine

Money Laundering and Conspiracy to do the same, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(b)(1)(i) and (h)

Maximum Penalty: 20 years in custody, 3 years of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine

Criminal Forfeiture pursuant to Title 21, United States Code, Section 853

AGENCIES

North County Regional Gang Task Force
United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement
San Diego Sheriff's Office
Oceanside Police Department
San Diego Police Department

An indictment is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.